

## Message Text

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TO SECSTATE WASHDC 7806

INFO AMEMBASSY SAIGON

C O N F I D E N T I A L ROME 15066

EXDIS

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PFOR, VT, VT

SUBJECT: ACTIVITIES OF NORTH VIETNAMESE BISHOP DURING 4TH SYNOD

REF: SAIGON 13377

1. ARCHBISHOP CO-ADJUTOR OF HANOI, MSG. JOSEPH-MARIE THRINH-VAN-CON, FIRST NORTH VIETNAMESE PRELATE TO ATTEND INTERNATIONAL CATHOLIC MEETING SINCE 1954, REMAINED IN ROME OVER ONE MONTH FOR WORLD SYNOD OF BISHOPS WHICH CONCLUDED OCT 26. TRINH'S PRESENCE IN ROME COULD BEST BE DESCRIBED AS LOW-KEY AND ULTRA-DISCREET. QUITE OBVIOUSLY HE WISHED TO DO NOTHING TO DAMAGE HIS STANDING IN EYES OF GDRV OR PREJUDICE POSSIBILITY OF OTHER NORTH VIETNAMESE CHURCHMEN TRAVELLING TO FOREIGN COUNTRIES. ON PERSONAL SIDE, ARCHBISHOP TRINH HAD EMOTIONAL REUNION WITH HIS MOTHER WHO RESIDES IN SAIGON AND WHO HE HAD NOT SEEN IN 20 YEARS. SHE ALSO ACCOMPANIED HIM DURING PRIVATE AUDIENCE HE HAD WITH POPE ON OCT. 25.

2. IN HIS OPENING STATEMENT TO SYNOD, POPE PAUL SINGLED OUT ARCHBISHOP TRINH, NOTING THE NOVELTY OF HIS PRESENCE WHICH DREW APPLAUSE FROM ASSEMBLED BISHOPS. TRINH ADDRESSED SYNOD TWICE, FIRST ON OCT. 3 WHEN HE DISCUSSED IN ANODYNE TERMS STATUS OF CHURCH IN DRV. HE EMPHASIZED GREAT SHORTAGE OF PRIESTS--ONLY 300 FOR OVER 1 MILLION CATHOLICS. ACCORDING TO TRINH, FAITHFUL FLOCK TO CHURCHES ON SUNDAYS AND HOLIDAYS, MANY EVEN BEGINNING JOURNEY AT MIDNIGHT IN ORDER TO ARRIVE ON TIME. HE SAID NATIONAL

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RELIGIOUS HOLIDAYS SEEM EVENTS OF GREAT IMPORTANCE WHICH

PROVIDE OPPORTUNITY FOR A MEETING ALSO WITH NON-CHRISTIANS WHO FREQUENTLY INVITED TO DINE WITH CHRISTIAN FRIENDS. AT THESE GATHERINGS ONE SPEAKS FREELY ABOUT RELIGION. THESE SIGNS OF FAITH PLUS INTENSE PRAYER AND DEVOTION TO THE EUCHARIST AND THE HOLY VIRGIN, LEAD ONE, HE SAID, TO HOPE FOR A FUTURE SPREAD OF THE GOSPEL MESSAGE. ON OCT. 14, ARCHBISHOP TRINH SPOKE TO SYNOD ON ROLE OF YOUTH IN MISSIONARY ACTIVITIES. THIS INTERVENTION IN A AN EXTREMELY GENERAL TONE COVERED A PROBLEM OF INTERNATIONAL DIMENSIONS AND HE DID NOT DISCUSS SITUATION IN DRV. ONLY OTHER PUBLIC ACTIVITY WAS TO SAY MASS AT LOCAL ROMAN CHURCH ON MISSIONARY SUNDAY. OCT 20.

3. ACCORDING TO RELIABLE VATICAN SOURCES, TRINH DID NOT HAVE MUCH NEW TO ADD TO ALREADY KNOWN FACTS ABOUT STATUS OF CHURCH IN NORTH VIETNAM. HE DID, HOWEVER, CONFIRM SITUATION REMAINS STABLE. OTHER THAN RECENT REOPENING OF HANOI SEMINARY WITH HANDFUL OF STUDENTS, NO HOPE FOR IMPROVEMENTS ON HORIZON. CHURCH IS TOTALLY SUBJECT TO STATE CONTROL AND SUPERVISION FOR EVERY ACTIVITY, INCLUDING TRANSFERS OF PERSONNEL, ORDINATIONS, STUDENT SEMINARIANS, PUBLICATIONS. SOURCE SAID THAT ONLY BY EXERCISING ABSOLUTE DISCRETION AND SENSIVITY TO GOVERNMENT REGULATIONS DOES CHURCH MANAGE TO AVOID OUTRIGHT PERSECUTION. VOLPE

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